

## CRACOW.

POLAND is about the last country to which one thinks of going for mountain scenery. Prussia is flat enough; but Prussia has got the Hartz. Russia is worse; yet Russia, as we have learned to know, is bounded by the Caucasus, which exceeds in height and scarcely yields in beauty to the Swiss Alps. But Poland suggests only boundless plains and monotonous forests, muddy rivers winding slowly through long tracts of marsh into a shallow sea. Such romance as the country has to most of us it derives from its sufferings, and from the vision of bands of insurgents eluding the pursuit of Russian columns in the depths of those pathless woods.

Nevertheless, Poland has a mountain region, and a very noble and beautiful region it is. Only let it be remembered that to the geographer Poland does not mean merely the Poland of this century, which has now been made politically a part of Russia, but old Poland as it stood before the partition; or, to be more exact, that country in which the Polish race dwells, and over which the Polish tongue is still spoken. That is to say, Poland includes Galicia, now a province of the Austrian Empire; but in tongue, religion, habits, history, and sentiment just as representative of old Poland as Warsaw itself. And it is in Galicia that the Polish Alps lie. Some seventy miles to the south-southwest of Cracow, the hills which lie on the borders of Galicia and Hungary rise into a group or ridge of bold and lofty mountains, which the Germans generally call the Central Carpathians, but which the natives know by the Slavonic name of Tatra. This mountain mass—which contains in a small area a great variety of scenery, and an extraordinary number of interesting peaks, lakes, and valleys—is most easily reached from the south, where a railway skirts it. But a much more interesting approach is from the north or Polish side, through the grand old city of Cracow.

Cracow is so little visited by Englishmen—so very little that when an unmistakable stranger is seen in the streets, conjecture can assign him no origin more distant than Berlin—that some account of it may not be unwelcome. It belongs to that melancholy but interesting class of cities of which Edinburgh, Dublin, Toledo, Venice, Trondhjem, and Kiev are examples—cities that have once been but are no longer capitals of independent states. In a city like Milan or Cologne every fourth or fifth generation pulls down the dwellings, the warehouses, even often the churches of its forefathers, to erect bigger or more commodious ones in their stead. London is the most conspicuous example of such ruin. But Cracow, like most of those sister cities just referred to, lost her great position as a capital quite suddenly, and has since then been nothing more than a provincial town, a sort of magnified county town, with few industries, and only a moderate trade. Hence the old things have stood; and though, to be sure, private houses have been modernized, still the antique character of the place has suffered very little.

Cracow is the most distinctively Polish city in all the region which once was Poland. Warsaw is a recent and upstart place by comparison. It did not become the seat of government till the seventeenth century, and of late years it has been to some extent Russified. But the older city is still thoroughly national. The Polish language is the official speech, the traditions of the departed monarchy cling round the cathedral where the national heroes lie buried, and the castle, where the kings of the older dynasties held their barbaric feasts.

Cracow lies near the southern edge of a vast plain—that vast plain that stretches all the way northward to the Baltic, and eastward to the Ural Mountains. On the south the country, at first gently undulating, rises by degrees into high hills, whose tops, some twenty or thirty miles distant, give a blue background to the landscape. It is a well-cultivated country, with patches of forest here and there, but, in the main, of open arable and pasture land, dotted over with frequent villages. Across the plain, and just washing the city, flows the broad and sluggish Vistula, too muddy for beauty, too shallow for much navigation, but still with an air of dignity about it not unworthy of the national river of Poland. Within, the aspect of the city is curiously different from that of the German towns which the traveller has lately left. The streets are wider and more straight, and in the centre there is a great open square somewhat like the Meidan of the East, where fairs are held, and round which the best shops and the chief cafés are planted. The houses are tall and solid; some of them look as if they had been, and indeed probably were, the palaces of that turbulent old nobility whose descendants have now been reduced to poverty, or cherish in a hopeless exile their memories of departed greatness. The hotel in which we staid was one of these—a tall pile with walls thick

enough for a mediæval castle, broad stone staircases, a great gallery running on each floor round a court-yard, and lofty chambers in which one felt lost at night. The churches, whose bells clang without ceasing, have the same air of grand but somewhat ponderous gloom. Architecturally they are not very striking, and more interesting from the beautiful glass and the wood-carvings which one or two of them contain than from any peculiarities of their style, which is that of East Germany.

One has frequent occasion to remark in these countries for how much more the influence of religion may count than does the influence of race. As Catholics who had got their Christianity from the West, the Slavonic Poles, like the Slavonic Bohemians, looked always toward the West, and were in intimate ecclesiastical as well as political relations with Germany and Hungary. They were, indeed, for a long time dependent on the Germanic Empire. Their churches, therefore, are of a German Gothic, and were probably designed by German builders; while their kinsfolk, the Russians, having been converted by missionaries of the Orthodox Eastern Church, belonged to an utterly different sphere, and followed the models of Constantinople in architecture and art as well as in discipline and ritual. The Cathedral of Cracow (which has been the seat of an archbishop for many centuries) stands on the only height in the city—a steep bluff overlooking the Vistula, and commanding a splendid prospect to the north and east along its winding shores. This bluff was probably the first inhabited part of the city, and very likely the fortified kernel round which it grew up. It is, in fact, an Acropolis, well placed both for defense and to command the navigation of the river. The top of the hill is covered by the palace of the kings—a huge but rather ugly mass of buildings, no part of which looks older than the sixteenth century, while most of it is evidently later. It has now been turned into a barrack, and its dull stuccoed courts and interminable galleries are full of white-coated soldiers lounging about and chattering in all the tongues which an Austrian army speaks. Close to the palace, and squeezed in between it and the edge of the abrupt hill-slope, is the cathedral. It is a small church, which would go inside the nave of York Minster, and its exterior is ungainly. But its historical associations more than make up for any want of visible majesty. It teems with monuments that call up the greatest names, the most striking incidents, in the long story of Poland's greatness and decay. It is the Westminster Abbey of the Polish people. The high altar is adorned by a sumptuous silver shrine, under which rest the bones of St. Stanislas, the martyred patron saint of the nation, who was Bishop of Cracow, and slain by a ferocious king in the eleventh century. The chapels on both sides were most of them erected by one or other of the great families, and contain busts of them, and pictures representing famous scenes in Polish history. One has a superb "Christ," by Thorwaldsen. In the crypt beneath, to which you descend down a staircase whose top is covered by a brazen trap-door, are the tombs of the kings, their wives and children. You are led with flickering candles through a labyrinth of chilly vaults, and faintly discern amid the gloom the huge sarcophagi within which lie the bones of forgotten potentates—potentates whose very names the Western traveller has scarcely heard, but who ruled a kingdom larger than France, a kingdom that stretched from the Oder to the Dnieper. The earlier tombs, beginning from the twelfth century, are very rude, and all are plain and massive. Only two uncrowned heroes have been admitted into this royal sepulchre, the last two heroes of the nation—and are they to be its last?—Kosciusko and Poniatowski. They lie in the central vault, on either side of the coffin of John Sobieski. But the spot in the church which speaks most of all to a Polish heart is the main chapel of the choir, immediately behind the altar of St. Stanislaus. Here Polish sovereigns were crowned from the first building of the cathedral down till the melancholy end. Here are set, facing each other, two chairs of state. The one is the archiepiscopal chair of Cracow; the other is the throne of the King of Poland, the throne that has so long stood empty, and is never to be filled again. Its gilding is tarnished, and the dust lies thick upon the faded red silk that covers it. In this bare and silent chapel, which once echoed to the shouts of the assembled nobles, it is the most pathetic emblem of the extinction of a powerful kingdom and the enslavement of a gifted people.